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SUBJECT: BOSNIA: CODEL MCCAIN-LIEBERMAN DELIVERS MESSAGE ON  
NEED FOR POLITICAL AND DEFENSE REFORM

REF: A. SARAJEVO 114  
[1](#)B. STATE 8501

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (SBU) During their February 5 visit to Sarajevo, a Congressional Delegation led by Senators John McCain and Joseph Lieberman delivered strong messages to the BiH Tri-Presidency and Minister of Defense on the need to make real progress on constitutional and defense reform so that BiH can move forward toward NATO and EU integration. The delegation expressed strong US solidarity with BiH and our commitment to assist the country; however, they emphasized that BiH must make concrete progress before it can be a viable NATO and EU candidate. The delegation's visit received wide favorable coverage in all media outlets, including their bi-partisan message as to the U.S. commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of BiH. End summary.

Tri-Presidency; Appreciate your Help; More Needs to be Done  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) The congressional delegation, consisting of Senators John McCain, Joseph Lieberman and Mark Udall, as well as Representatives Jane Harman, Loretta Sanchez and Jeff Flake, discussed current political obstacles and the steps necessary to move forward toward Euro-Atlantic integration with BiH Tri-Presidency Members Zeljko Komsic (Croat), Haris Silajdzic (Bosniak) and Nebojsa Radmanovic (Serb). While they noted some progress in recent years, Senators McCain and Lieberman expressed concern over the failure to reach compromises on important political issues. Senator Lieberman stressed continued U.S. commitment to protect Bosnia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The U.S. delegation conveyed their gratitude for Bosnia's contribution to peacekeeping forces in Iraq and its stated intent to contribute to ISAF. Further, Senator Lieberman urged Bosnia, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, to stand with the U.S. and its allies in potential future sanctions toward Iran.

U.S. Concern over Political Stagnation  
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[1](#)3. (SBU) The U.S. delegation expressed support for BiH's desire to obtain MAP status and NATO membership; however,

they highlighted U.S. concerns about political stagnation and the need to destroy Bosnian military's excess weapons and ammunition. Senator Lieberman emphasized that BiH must make concrete progress on reforms and demonstrate that it is capable of maintaining stability in the country and region before BiH can be a viable candidate for EU and NATO membership. Senator McCain noted the recent unsuccessful attempts to reach agreement on constitutional reforms, including the recent efforts by Deputy Secretary James Steinberg and Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt at Butmir. He solicited the opinion of the Tri-Presidency members as whether they saw the recent attempts as failures and what should be done to bring the process to a successful conclusion.

#### Tri-Presidency Agrees on Overall Goal; Differs on Details

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14. (SBU) While all Tri-Presidency Members stated that they subscribed to the collective goal of obtaining NATO and EU membership, they noted varying challenges and solutions to the current political situation. Komsic asserted that the timing of the Butmir constitutional talks doomed the effort to failure, because political tensions were already so high as to preclude any successful compromise. Komsic proposed organizing a large international conference, similar to Butmir, but with a larger international presence, including Russia, EU, NATO, Turkey and the neighboring countries. Silajdzic said the lack of consensus on the Dayton Peace Accords is a major part of the political problem in Bosnia. President Silajdzic also noted that the authority of the High Representative has been minimized, and asserted that the Office of the High Representative (OHR) should stay until its mandate is fulfilled. President Radmanovic blamed internal

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political problems as the primary obstacle to reaching the long-term goals of MAP and EU candidacy. He commended the Dayton Peace Accords, citing them as the "best thing to happen to Bosnia in terms of an international treaty." He also expressed his desire to close OHR, blaming the office for being an obstacle to BiH moving forward.

#### MOD Meeting on Defense Reform Issues

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15. (SBU) In a meeting with Bosnia and Herzegovina's Minister of Defense, Selmo Cikotic, the delegation highlighted the successes of defense reform. They also thanked the Minister and the defense establishment for Bosnia's support to coalition forces in Iraq as well as their expressed intention to support peace-keeping missions in Afghanistan. Senator McCain told Cikotic that the delegation understood that many in Bosnia were disappointed about the recent decision not to give Bosnia a NATO Membership Action Plan, but expressed concern at the stagnation of Bosnia's political process. Senator Lieberman lauded the successful unification in 2005-6 of the separate entity armies into the unified BiH Armed Forces. But he added that, while the U.S. supports Bosnia's goal of MAP, political progress would likely be necessary for Bosnia to attain that goal. Senator Lieberman suggested that, in the meantime, Bosnia's defense establishment and leaders focus on the remaining objectives of defense reform to smooth that process.

#### BiH's Disappointment over MAP; Sees Future in NATO

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16. (SBU) Minister Cikotic responded that the best way to ensure representation for all ethnic interests in Bosnia was through effective and functional state level institutions, of which defense institutions are the best example. He reiterated that the defense reforms of 2006 were successful because of U.S. involvement and all parties agreed that NATO membership would improve the security and stability of Bosnia. Cikotic thanked the delegation for the continued

U.S. support in strengthening the Armed Forces of BiH, adding that he was committed to ensuring that every dollar was a good investment. Noting that many new member states joined NATO before the EU, Cikotic stressed that NATO accession is seen by many as a necessary stepping stone to full integration into the "community of progressive states". Minister Cikotic asserted that, although the NATO decision not to grant BiH MAP status was designed to punish anti-reform elements, in fact it did the very opposite. It rewarded those who were blocking reforms, he said, and weakened the position of those who were pursuing reforms to make progress towards NATO membership. The rejection already gave rise in some quarters to the dangerous sentiment "NATO said no to us already, so why should we sacrifice anything." Bosnia must make fast progress towards NATO, he argued, or it risks losing the impetus for reform.

#### Need to Destroy Excess Weapons and Ammunition

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17. (SBU) The delegation stressed BiH's need to destroy thousands of tons of dangerous excess weapons, ammunition and explosives left over from the war. Minister Cikotic replied that the process is ongoing and that the Ministry expected to find a solution to the problem in one year. (Note: This is contrary to Embassy's understanding. End note.) He asserted that all excess weapons had been slated for sale, donation or destruction, without admitting that the vast majority has been slated for sale. Cikotic indicated that it might be possible for BiH to destroy more of the excess weapons rather than sell them. However, he added, this would become more likely if the U.S. Congress authorized drawdown authority that could equip Bosnia's armed forces with new equipment, such as helicopters and armored personnel carriers. (Note: There is no relationship between equipping the armed forces with new equipment, and their efforts to deal with equipment that they have already declared as unneeded surplus. End note.)

#### Years Before Bosnia will be Mine-Free

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18. (SBU) Responding to Congressman Flake's inquiry on BiH's demining operations, Cikotic responded that in 1996 experts estimated that it would take 75 years for Bosnia to be mine-free. Cikotic added that the latest projection from the BiH Mine Action Center is that Bosnia will be mine-free in 2019. Cikotic pointed out that all the contaminated areas are marked, and although mine casualties are falling they still occur every year. He highlighted that the Armed Forces contribution is successful and exceeded its level of planned demining last year by 40 percent. (Note: Cikotic's comments on demining were optimistic. Overall responsibility for demining falls to the Ministry of Civil Affairs rather than the Ministry of Defense. End note.)

#### Press Conference and Coverage

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19. (SBU) The visit received positive coverage in local media outlets throughout the country. Over 70 journalists from all BiH media outlets attended the conference with the delegation, together with their colleagues from international news wire services, such as Reuters, AP and AP TV. All press outlets showcased the delegation's strong message of support to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of BiH, but also their expression of "disappointment that the efforts of Deputy Secretary Steinberg and Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt failed to result in a solution." BH Television highlighted the delegation's call on BiH authorities to "overcome ethnic divisions and lead the country to the EU and NATO membership." Hayat Television emphasized Senator McCain's message that "all our colleagues, Democrats and

Republicans, are dedicated to the reconciliation process in this country." Hayat also highlighted Senator Lieberman's message on the importance of the upcoming elections in which voters will not just choose among candidates, but rather will make the choice "whether they want the country to go back toward divisions and hostilities or (whether) they want the country to make progress toward integrity, toward NATO and EU." The Sarajevo daily "Dnevni Avaz" declared Senator McCain to be "personality of the day" and highlighted his message that "one of the reasons why we came here is to state the U.S. solidarity with BiH citizens. As long as we are privileged to serve, we will keep reminding our voters that something like Srebrenica must never happen again anywhere else, especially not in Europe."

110. (U) This cable has been cleared by Senators McCain and Lieberman.  
ENGLISH